



Congressman Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan

Before the House Armed Services Committee

2023 Member Day Testimony

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2118 Rayburn House Office Building

Thank you, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Smith, and Members of the Committee on Armed Services, for the invitation to submit testimony on our nation's Defense priorities as you craft the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024.

In addition to the joint request I made with Congresswoman Radewagen of American Samoa, I ask that you consider two proposals for inclusion in the 2024 NDAA. The first proposal is my bill, H.R. 560, the Northern Mariana Islands Population Stabilization Act. This bipartisan bill is intended to bolster our nation's strategic interests in the Western Pacific by maintaining the population and prosperity of the Marianas, the district I represent.

The Marianas is part of the chain of U.S. and U.S.-affiliated islands that faces Chinese expansion in the Pacific region. Through the Marianas, the U.S. controls an ocean area of 289,000 square miles, greater than the size of Texas.

Yet, the U.S. presence here is at risk. According to the 2020 Census, the population of the Marianas declined by 12.2 percent since the 2010 census. This is the second largest decline among all states and non-state areas of our nation over that 10-year period.

This population erosion, and the loss of economic viability that results, occurs against the backdrop of increased competition with China in the Western Pacific, a time when the United States needs to be strengthening our position in the region, not shrinking in significance.

The Northern Mariana Islands Population Stabilization Act builds on several laws enacted during the Trump administration and on previous action by the House.

In the 116th Congress, we passed this same legislation by voice vote without dissent. It allows certain long-term foreign workers and investors already lawfully present in the islands to apply for permanent status in the Marianas-only. Previously, President Trump had approved

USPL 115-218, defining these long-term workers, and signed USPL 116-24, creating the Marianas-only resident status.

The Marianas-only resident status that President Trump sanctioned provides no eligibility for public assistance. It bars entry into any other part of the United States except for purpose of transit through Guam to a non-U.S. destination. The status President Trump approved is revocable in case of communicable disease, criminal conviction, or terrorist activity.

Making this Marianas-only status available simply encourages continued residence and employment by people already lawfully present and gainfully employed; and doing so would help to stabilize the population in our islands. The population eligible for Marianas-only status under H.R. 560, which cannot increase, is only 1,600.

The Congressional Budget Office determined in 2019 this legislation has no effect on direct spending. That assessment must remain the same in 2023, as the number of affected individuals has only declined.

This is a simple, straightforward response to the problem of population loss in the Marianas. It is not a total solution, but acknowledgement a problem exists and must be addressed.

I ask that this Committee see the bipartisan Northern Mariana Islands Population Stabilization Act as an important component of our larger national response to the continuing Chinese expansion occurring throughout the Pacific.

My second request is that the 2024 NDAA include language requiring the Department of Defense to produce a report detailing its plan on how it would ensure service academy applicants from the Marianas receive their required medical examinations at no cost.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, most Northern Marianas service academy nomination applicants had to travel to the naval hospital in Guam – the nearest military medical facility – to receive a medical examination. While the examination required of all academy applicants by the Department of Defense Medical Examination Review Board was free, the applicant had to pay for airfare, lodging, ground transportation, and other expenses out of pocket.

Because of travel restrictions during the pandemic, nominees were allowed to be seen by private physicians in the Marianas, but the examination fees charged by the private clinicians were paid out of pocket and nonrefundable. Additionally, academy appointees would then be re-examined once they report to the academy. While paying a local physician to conduct the medical exam is less costly than having to travel outside the district, this is an unfair burden that no other service academy applicant in the states or areas with military medical facilities must cover on their own.

All applicants to the service academies in every part of the country should be treated equally. Having to pay to travel to another territory or state or paying for the exam itself to be considered for an academy appointment should not fall on the applicants and their families.

I ask that the Secretary be required to report to this Committee its plan on how service academy applicants would be able to receive their medical examinations in their home districts free of charge.

I thank the Committee for its consideration of these two proposals for inclusion in the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2024.

I also thank the Committee for keeping a keen eye on the expansion of military activity in the Northern Marianas and for working with me as these plans continue to develop. The military buildup and presence in the Marianas region will have long-term consequences for the people I represent; and I appreciate the partnership of this Committee in managing these developments in the best interest of my constituents and of the national security needs of our nation.